JUSTICE AND THE GENESIS OF WAR

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INTRODUCTION

In this book I argue that the behavior of states in international politics does not merely reflect a concern for power and interest, but often a concern for the perceived demands of justice. This is not a novel claim; it may be found, for example, in the works of writers as diverse as Hugo Grotius and Alfred Thayer Mahan.[1] Yet its significance has been utterly lost on contemporary international relations theory.

Students of international politics readily acknowledge that states use the language of justice and injustice in their relations with one another, but are generally skeptical that this fact could be analytically useful. Some dismiss the use of such language as rationalization, deliberate misrepresentation, or propaganda, and assume that it masks a more basic opportunism or pursuit of self-interest. They therefore question the *sincerity* of states' claims to justice. Others credit the sincerity of these claims, but tend to deny that the justice motive can be useful in explaining state behavior on the ground that what states perceive to be *just* is materially indistinguishable from what serves their interest, or on the ground that, since states *always* use the language of justice and injustice, the justice motive is a constant and cannot explain variations in state behavior or help identify the conditions under which states are more or less likely to act in particular ways. The net result of both forms of skepticism is that the justice motive plays no significant role in international relations theory today.

I hope to show that the skeptics are mistaken and the omission regrettable. National leaders very often *do* see the world through normative lenses, and very often act in accordance with their perceptions of what is right or just. While some national leaders may indeed use the language of justice insincerely, many – in my view, most – do not. Moreover, while there is often a considerable degree of overlap between the things leaders claim for their states as a matter of justice and those things that would serve their national interests, the sense of injustice can engage powerful emotions that prevent dispassionate deliberation, hinder the careful weighing of costs and

benefits, frustrate negotiated settlements of differences, and increase the likelihood of pernicious misperceptions and misjudgments, with deleterious effects on leaders' abilities to serve their national interests effectively. Furthermore, while the justice motive may well be a "constant" of international politics, in the sense that national leaders are always vigilant in the defense of their perceived entitlements, they do not perceive *everything* that would serve their nations' interests to be theirs by right, and do not describe all of their interests in the language of entitlement. Only those issues that touch their perceived entitlements succeed in engaging their senses of justice.

Thus the omission is regrettable in the first instance because the justice motive has considerable analytic value that students of international politics hitherto have overlooked. By attending to the justice motive, we can craft better explanations not only of particularly important events in international politics, but also of broad patterns of state behavior. We may also manage to improve our ability to predict future events – something at which international relations theory has proven woefully inept to date – by refining our understanding of the relationship between what states seek and how they behave.

But, in addition to its analytical gains, an appreciation of the role of the justice motive in international affairs can have practical value. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to show that while national leaders are keenly aware of their own concern for justice, they are often insensitive to the role of the justice motive in the behavior of others, with the result that they seriously misjudge their protagonists' interests, objectives, and resolve. If national leaders were more attentive to the normative claims of others – and more circumspect about their own – they could better anticipate and manage conflicts, and in some cases avoid them altogether. As long as they are not, there is little hope of progress toward the elusive goal of a well-ordered international society in which conflicting claims of justice are resolved peacefully as a matter of course.

These are sweeping claims best treated by an ambitious research program rather than a single book. Nevertheless, I attempt to demonstrate the plausibility of these claims, and to show that these are researchable propositions. I do so by exploring the agency of the justice motive in the outbreak of five Great Power wars; by using the histories of those wars to probe the plausibility of a number of hypotheses about the role of the justice motive in state behavior; and by examining some of the central philosophical issues these cases raise to suggest that normative political theory has a crucial role to play in translating empirical findings into useful policy prescriptions.

I have, so to speak, three targets. The first is what I call the "Realist" account of motivation that undergirds the edifice both of classical Realism and its modern descendant, "neorealism" or "structural realism."[2] This is the view that states are motivated overwhelmingly either by self-preservation or self-aggrandizement. It is in Great Power wars that we would expect to find Realist motivations most powerfully at work because Great Powers are thought to be most concerned with the international distribution of power, and it is only in such wars that their status as Great Powers – and sometimes their very existence as states – is immediately put at risk. By demonstrating that the justice motive plays a crucial role in the genesis of Great Power wars, and by contending that an appeal to the justice motive can explain several aspects of the outbreak of these wars that seem counterintuitive from a Realist perspective, I hope to make the strongest possible case for the plausibility of the claim that the justice motive plays an important role in state behavior generally.

My second target is the conception of human nature – and thus of national leaders – upon which Realism is founded: egoistic, calculating, untrusting, and, above all, fearful. I do not claim that this conception of human nature is *false*; merely that it is woefully incomplete. To read the classic texts of international relations theory, one would never suspect that human beings have right brains as well as left; that in addition to being selfish, they also love, hate, hope, and despair; that they sometimes act not out of interest, but out of courage, politeness, or rage; and, that in addition to seeking to do *well*, they often seek to do *right*. One would also tend to forget that the Hitlers and the Stalins of this world are the exceptions, not the norms. More typical are the Herbert Hoovers and the Neville Chamberlains, men who operated within the full domain of human experience and whose foreign policies reflected that fact. In short, international relations theory needs to rediscover the human soul.

My third target is the "empirical-normative gap" within political science itself, which both results from and perpetuates the hegemony of power-political analysis, and which prevents communication and cross-fertilization between those who attempt to understand the nature and causes of state behavior, and those who are concerned with the philosophical dimensions of international politics. Nowhere is this gap more apparent or more unfortunate than in the study of war. The logic of many theories of war is deterministic: wars are the products of inexorable forces or laws that leaders obey but are powerless to control. But normative theories are essentially non-deterministic. Just war theory, for example, specifies a set of conditions under which

resort to war may be morally justified, assuming (on the principle "ought" implies "can") that states can *choose* whether or not to wage war, and that the choice may be influenced by calculations of right and wrong, not merely by calculations of power and interest. If the empirical-normative gap is intellectually mistaken, then it will have a pernicious effect both on our understanding of the causes of war and on our understanding of international morality. On the one hand, an appreciation of the *empirical* relevance of moral notions will lead to a better understanding of the forces that shape world politics; on the other hand, an appreciation of the *actual* moral claims states make can lead to less parochial (and hence more prescriptively useful) theories of international morality. Moreover, at a practical level, if perceptions of injustice are an important and neglected source of international conflict, then a reconsideration of the meaning of a concept such as "justice," when applied in an international and intercultural context, may lead to the creation and promotion of mechanisms and institutions better suited than existing ones (in certain respects, and in certain circumstances) to the tasks of conflict prevention and management.

Politics is an inherently normative pursuit that exhibits identifiable behavioral patterns. The institutional cohabitation of normative theory and empiricism within political science therefore seems natural. Why, then, should philosophers and empiricists have such difficulty speaking to each other? It is clearly not the result of confusion about the subject matter of political science itself. Rather, it would seem to be a function of deep hermeneutical and epistemological rifts that separate the humanities (for which political theory has a natural affinity) from the natural sciences (which empirical political science seeks in various ways to emulate). Social science is, after all, somewhat uncomfortably caught between the two. But this only makes it all the more important to try to bring them closer together. Bridging the empirical-normative gap at a particularly narrow point would seem to be a productive step in that direction; examining the role of the justice motive in the genesis of war presents just such an opportunity.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

While the foregoing discussion provides a glimmer of my concerns and my goals, it raises a number of important substantive, definitional, and methodological questions that require fuller treatment before the analysis itself can get under way. These are the subjects of Chapter 1, in which I elaborate and substantiate my

characterization of the "Realist" account of motivation; I define and present an account of the justice motive, distinguishing it from mere self-interest; I attempt to demonstrate that, in addition to providing a corrective to the Realist account of motivation, the justice motive can play a crucial role in the elaboration and operationalization of other theories of decision, and that it accounts for certain discrepancies between the predictions of those theories and the historical record; I present a number of hypotheses about the supposed agency of the justice motive in international politics; I present the rationale for exploring that agency through particular historical case studies; and I address the relevant methodological issues, anticipating some obvious objections.

In Chapters 2 through 6, I examine the role of the justice motive in the outbreak of five Great Power wars. In each I attempt to gauge both the *importance* of the justice motive *vis-à-vis* other motivations in conditioning and triggering the conflict, and its *agency* – i.e., how it deflected the course of events in the direction of war rather than peace. These chapters are heavily interpretive, occasionally counterfactual, and (unavoidably) much briefer than the subject matter could permit. Accordingly, readers who see them as *histories* of these wars will find much in them that is objectionable. These chapters are intended to serve a very precise set of theoretical purposes, and I attempt to acknowledge their limitations by being circumspect in the conclusions I draw from each.

In Chapter 7, I turn to the philosophical issues raised by the supposition that states are motivated by concern for the perceived demands of justice in international affairs and that this can increase the likelihood of war. The central difficulty is that when states' conceptions of justice clash, the institutions and norms of international society may not be sufficiently developed, or may not enjoy sufficient legitimacy, to permit a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Where such a clash of conceptions may be traceable to deep cultural differences, we may expect the problem to be particularly acute. How are we to know what the "just" outcome is in such circumstances? Does it, in fact, make sense to say that there is one? What can "justice" mean in this context? These are among the issues I address in this final chapter. I argue that the term "justice" can have no meaning in the absence of norms and institutions capable of resolving disputes of this kind. Progress toward a "just" world order, I suggest, can only lie in the deliberate and piecemeal proliferation of regimes whose members agree to regard their arrangements as authoritative. While such progress is possible, it is undoubtedly slow. In the meantime, states as a matter of course will

project their particular conceptions of justice onto issues that fall outside the rubric of robust normative regimes, aggravating conflicts of interest by giving them an inappropriate moral tenor. True "realism," I argue, requires that we acknowledge this, and take it into account.